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R E P O R T

OF THE

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

OF

THE ELMIRA

19
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Civil Service Reform Association

FOR 1882.

WITH ESSAYS ON

"LEGISLATION AND THE SPOILS SYSTEM."

BY FREDERICK COLLIN.

"THE REAL OBJECTS OF CIVIL SERVICE REFORM."

BY CHARLES R. PRATT.

ELMIRA, N. Y.:

ADVERTISING ASSOCIATION, BOOK AND JOB PRINTERS

1883.

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FRANCIS HALL.

Vice-Presidents,

SEYMOUR DEXTER, M. H. ARNOT,
S. HOTCHKIN, W. C. WEY,
C. J. LANGDON.

Treasurer,

JOHN C. GREVES.

Secretary,

THERON A. WALES.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE.

C. R. PRATT, E. L. ADAMS,
J. L. WOODS, EDGAR DENTON,
FREDERICK COLLIN, C. G. DECKER,
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National Vice-President

J. D. F. SLEE.

Delegate to National League.

C. A. COLLIN.

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REPORT OF EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE.

GENTLEMEN—The Elmira Civil Service Reform Association was organized on the evening of October 24, 1882, by the adoption of a constitution and by-laws, and a provisional list of officers to hold until the annual election, which it was provided should take place on the first Thursday in March, 1883. A resolution was also passed at this meeting directing that regular monthly sessions of the society should be held, at which discussions should take place or addresses be delivered on topics appertaining to civil service reform. The following is the list of officers chosen at the meeting:

President—General A. S. Diven.

Vice-Presidents—John Arnot, C. J. Langdon, Samuel Hotchkin, Thomas K. Beecher and Francis Hall.

Secretary—Dr. T. A. Wales.

Treasurer—John C. Greves.

Executive Committee—J. D. F. Slee, J. R. Joslyn, C. P. Bacon, C. G. Decker, C. R. Pratt, J. H. Barney, Boyd McDowell, E. L. Adams and C. A. Collin.

The Association thus organized proceeded promptly to work. A short circular was prepared by the Publication Committee, to which was appended a copy of the constitution and a list of members. This was circulated as perfectly as possible, and at each subsequent meeting of the Executive Committee large numbers of new names were added.

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Before the November election, also, a letter was issued addressed to each of the congressional candidates of the district, asking their views on civil service reform, and from each a reply was received of a courteous and satisfactory nature. These letters were published at the time in the daily papers, and it has not been thought worth while on that account to reproduce them here.

The monthly meeting for November was addressed by Francis Hall at some length and in a very acceptable manner, and his remarks were followed by other good speeches from members of the Association.

The December meeting was taken up with an examination and discussion of the Pendleton bill, so-called, which was then before Congress, and at the close of the debate a resolution was passed directing the Executive Committee to address a letter to the Hon. D. P. Richardson, our member in Congress, soliciting his favorable consideration of, and vote for, the bill at the proper time. When the bill passed Mr. Richardson's vote was recorded in favor of the same, and a brief note to the Secretary from him called attention to the fact.

In January the chairman of the Publication Committee procured the services of Professor W. G. Sumner, of Yale College, who delivered a trenchant and spirited lecture in the Elmina Opera House to a fine audience, composed of some of the most intelligent citizens of this place. His words did a great deal to awaken wider and more intelligent interest in the objects sought after by the Association.

About the time of the passage of the reform bill by Congress the Executive Committee procured and circulated a large number of "Publication number four," of the New York Association, entitled "Civil Service Reform in the New York Custom House," by Willard Brown. This is a clear statement of real results following the application of the reforms in the custom house, and has been well received.

The committee has also disseminated much minor information relating to the subject, and has furnished many items for the public press.

At the February meeting carefully prepared papers were read by Frederick Collin and Charles R. Pratt, copies of which are annexed to this report. The Rev. F. D. Hoskins had expected to present one, but the care and confusion incidental to the breaking up of his household, preparatory to removal from the city, prevented. He, however, gave the Association a stirring extemporaneous talk, which was received with much applause.

The Executive Committee has held regular meetings on the afternoon preceding the monthly evening meetings of the Association, and transacted such business as came before it.

The Chairman has been ably seconded by his associates, and is under special obligation to the chairmen of the Sub-Committees on Publication and Finance, Messrs. Joslyn and Pratt, for their effective assistance.

The report of the Treasurer and Finance Committee is subjoined. In conclusion the Executive Committee desire to particularly recognize the courtesy of the daily papers of the city in the free use of their columns, and other kindnesses extended at various times to the Association, and to thus make public recognition of the same.

And, finally, we congratulate the Association, and all honest seekers after political improvement in our governmental methods, on the unexpected but highly satisfactory progress made during the past year toward civil service reform. Much remains to be done. But let us be thankful that something has been accomplished. There is need, however, that our organization be kept intact, and a watchful eye maintained upon the experiment about to be tried. There are men who would willingly ruin it.

REPORT OF FINANCE COMMITTEE.

Receipts.

Received from dues of members	\$105 00
Received from contributions to lecture fund	59 00
Total receipts	<u>\$164 00</u>

Expenditures.

Paid expenses of Sumner's lecture	\$89 83
Paid for stationery, printing, postage and documents for circulation	69 94
Paid for use of R. Y. M. C. A. hall	3 00
Total expenditures	<u>\$162 77</u>
Balance on hand	1 23

(Signed)

THERON A. WALES,

J. D. F. SLEE,

*Chairman.**Secretary.*

LEGISLATION AND THE SPOILS SYSTEM,

ESSAY READ BY FREDERICK COLLIN, Esq., BEFORE THE ELMIRA
CIVIL SERVICE REFORM ASSOCIATION, MONDAY EVENING,
FEBRUARY 12, 1883.

GENTLEMEN OF THE ASSOCIATION—I have thought it would be instructive, and perhaps interesting, to consider to what extent legislation has tended to foster or hinder the growth of that system briefly, but sufficiently, designated as the Spoils System.

The civil service, that is, the appointment, compensation and service of civil officers and employes of the Government, is distributed among the three great departments, the Judicial, Legislative and Executive; the Executive department consisting of the President and his Cabinet, the heads of its various departments, and all persons, other than those of the Judicial or Legislative departments, connected with or employed by the Government. What I shall say relates to only that branch of the civil service connected with the Executive department.

In the year 1787, this people of the United States, having, with a courage and heroism unsurpassed in epic or legend, vindicated its right to be a free and independent people, framed a written constitution, prescribing a form of government, patterned after philosophers' theories and poets' dreams; a government by the people, in conception and form a very near neighbor to anarchy. It was a form of government adapted only to a nation whose citizens were loyal, intelligent and incorruptible; jealous of, and exercising with pride, the privileges of their citizenship.

To them were left the responsibilities of keeping the national character and the development of the administrative machinery in harmony with the Constitution.

The civil service of to-day is a growth resulting from administrative requirements, which were, to those who framed the Constitution, unknown and inconceivable. Such provisions as they made in regard to it are, "And he (the President) shall nominate, and by, and with the advice and consent of the Senate, shall appoint ambassadors . . . and all other officers of the United States whose appointments are not herein otherwise provided for. . . . But the Congress may, by law, vest the appointment of *such inferior officers* as they think proper, in the President alone, in the courts of law, or in the heads of departments."

Some lawyers and legislators have held that the terms "all other officers," and "such inferior officers," do not include clerks and employes of the government, but legislation and judicial authority have established the contrary.

The provisions fix no term of office, and no manner nor ground of removal. It was, however, from the first held that the power of removal was in the President, as an incident to the power of appointment.

To state it concisely, under the Constitution the President had the power to appoint, with the advice and consent of the Senate, each of the body of persons constituting the civil service.

The President had the absolute power to remove any of such appointees.

Congress might limit the President's power to appoint, by vesting the appointment of such inferior officers as it thought proper, in the heads of departments.

In these slender provisions there was room for much mischief and peril, unseen by, but perhaps not wholly without the imagination of some of our early statesmen. Until the year 1820, these provisions were supplemented by certain rules, or principles, which had the full force and effect of positive law. They were:

First—Every office is a public trust, existing solely for the purpose of carrying on and managing the business of the Govern-

ment in the most economical and efficient manner, and appointments must be made with that purpose alone in view.

Second—Congress had authority, and it was its duty “to impeach the President, if he should either allow an unworthy officer to retain his place or wantonly remove a meritorious officer,” such removal being an act of “maladministration.”

Third—The tenure of office was that of efficiency and good behavior.

Surely no citizen, no business man employing a clerk, will dispute the soundness, nor the practical character of those principles, yet to have brought them to the attention of a modern Congress would have seemed the very refinement of irony.

Near the close of the session of the Congress of 1820, a bill, prepared by cunning and unscrupulous, even if not unprincipled, politicians, was introduced and, without debate and the yeas and nays being called, was passed and became law. It fixed the terms of office of district attorneys, collectors of customs, surveyors of customs, naval and certain other officers, at four years, and *made those officers removable at the pleasure of the President*. This law did not create the Spoils System. It did, however, in response to the requests of its sponsors and attendants, open the door and permit and encourage that system to enter and make its home in the Federal Government. A moment's thought will demonstrate how thoroughly hostile it was to the principles then in force, as I have stated. The tenure of efficiency and good behavior was changed to that of “at the pleasure of the President.” It would no longer be an act of “mal-administration” to remove a worthy officer, or allow an unworthy officer to retain his position. If efficiency and character were no longer to be the tests for retention of office, they would not be for appointment to office. Their substitutes were skill in manipulating and controlling caucuses and elections, zeal for the party and fealty to party leaders. The term of office was made the presidential term so that the offices and subordinate offices connected with them, might be held out in each election as plunder or spoils, to incite to victory.

These subversive principles once introduced and recognized by law, quickly spread through the entire Government. At the passage of the law its intent and effects were unperceived by all, save only its devisers, but when afterwards made plain it met with vehement public condemnation from nearly every statesman who receives an honorable mention in history. Attempts were made to effect its repeal, but the law, in assisting unworthy men to office and positions of influence, was its own protector. The Senate passed the repealing act, the House refused and the law is still in force.

The supply of "Spoils" was further increased, in 1836, by a law providing that the terms of all postmasters whose compensation was \$1,000 a year, or upwards, should be four years, and they should likewise be removable at the pleasure of the President.

For some years prior to 1853, the civil service of England, which had become inefficient and corrupt, received at the hands of her statesmen grave consideration, resulting in reformatory legislation. Its spirit reached our legislative chambers and quickened the desire, never extinct in the minds of those who saw and were loyal enough to deplore and fear its results, to nullify the laws and eradicate the principles that favored and upheld the Spoils System. As a result a law was enacted requiring the heads of the seven departments at Washington to arrange the *clerks* of their respective departments into four classes: The annual salary of clerks of the fourth class to be \$1,800; of the third, \$1,600; of the second, \$1,400; and of the first, \$1,200. It was further provided that no clerk should be appointed, in either of such classes, until examined "and found qualified by a board of three examiners, to consist of the chief of the bureau or office into which such clerk is to be appointed, and two other clerks to be selected by the head of the department." The next year Congress, under the power given by the Constitution, vested in heads of department authority, subject of course to such examination, to employ clerks of the four classes. Authority to appoint subordinates had, however, been exercised

by them a long while before, probably under some statute I have been unable to find, and incidental thereto was the power to remove their appointees.

I next come to the much discussed tenure of office act of 1867, to the effect that any civil officer who was, or thereafter might be appointed, with the advice and consent of the Senate, should not be removed during his term, without the consent of the Senate, or another person, with the advice and consent of the Senate, had been appointed in his place. Not an amendment has been made to the Constitution, or a statute passed limiting the power of removal, except this act, passed during the conflict between the Senate and President Johnson. Grave doubts as to its constitutionality have always been expressed. It is claimed, on the *one* hand, that the power of removal is wholly with the appointing power; whom the President appoints, he alone may remove; and on the other, that when appointments are made with the consent of the Senate, removals may, if Congress so provide, be made only with like consent. The effect of the act was to give to Senators a far wider and stronger hold on such offices, taking them from the control of the power responsible for their administration and placing them more irresistibly with the spoils already accumulated.

Such is the legislation tending to foster or hinder the growth of the Spoils System during what I may term the second period of the history of the civil service. It began with the ill-omened act of 1820, which gave that system its first foothold in the Federal Government. The system proved hardy and vigorous, and at the close of the period, in 1870, prevailed throughout the National Government and many of the State and municipal governments. Of its effects, let two statesmen who were witnesses of its growth, speak. Of it Mr. Webster said: "This principle of claiming a monopoly of office by right of conquest, unless the public shall effectually rebuke and restrain it, will entirely change the character of our Government. It elevates party above country; it forgets the common weal in the pursuit of personal emolument; it tends to form, it does form, we see

that it has formed, a political combination united by no common principle or opinions among its members, either upon the powers of the Government or the true policy of the country, but held together simply as an association, under the charm of a popular head, seeking to maintain possession of the Government by a vigorous exercise of its patronage." And Mr. Calhoun said: "When it came to be understood that all who hold office, hold by the tenure of partisan zeal and party service, it is easy to see that the certain, direct and inevitable tendency of such a state of things is to convert the entire body of those in office into corrupt and supple instruments of power, and to raise up a host of hungry, greedy and subservient partisans, ready for every service, however base and corrupt. * * * To prepare for the subversion of liberty and the establishment of despotism, no scheme more perfect could be devised."

Cogent proof of the evil results of the existence of the Spoils System lies in the fact that many intelligent citizens regard it as an essential element in our political system, and any attempt to return to the principles of our forefathers as impracticable.

It may here be asked why the law of 1853 was ineffectual. I answer, for several reasons.

First—Each of the Board of Examiners was liable to removal for party and political purposes. A refusal to pass an applicant might cause his removal, upon the request of the Senator or Congressman who proposed and supported the applicant. A refusal was therefore unlikely.

Second—There was no competition and no standard. The applicant was examined privately, or in the presence of the official pressing his appointment. The examination was suited to the applicant. In the words of Mr. Mill: "It was a leaping bar test, and if the clerk did not come up to the bar it was somewhat lowered," or, if it was desirable to reject the applicant it might be raised.

Third—The examination was not open to all applicants. The board might examine Democrats, and refuse to examine Republi-

caus, and *vice versa*. The applicants outside of official favorites might have no opportunity to pass the examination.

As a fact, however, such examinations were perfunctory and formal. They were so spoken of by President Arthur when Collector at New York, while Mr. Graves testified, that when he entered the civil service, twenty years ago, the only examination made in his case was, the superior in the department looked over his shoulder while writing, and said: "I think you will pass."

In 1871, in response to a public sentiment no longer to be withstood, an act was passed "authorizing the President to prescribe such regulations for the admission of persons into the civil service . . . as may best promote the efficiency thereof, and ascertain the fitness of each candidate . . . and ability for the branch of service into which he seeks to enter," and for that purpose to employ suitable persons to conduct examinations of applicants. As the act of 1820 gave that system, which subverted and wrecked the principles originally controlling the civil service, its first foothold, this act was the first step towards restoring them. It has been followed by the act known as the "Pendleton Bill." Leaving the technical language of this act, I will, as concisely as I am able, state the method it provides for reforming the civil service.

The clerks and persons in each customs district and post-office, in which they together amount to as many as fifty, are to be arranged in four classes, but no mere laborer or workman is to be so classified.

To those classes, and the classes of clerks of the departments at Washington, formed, as I have stated, under the act of 1853, this act applies. The President will appoint, as Civil Service Commissioners, three persons, holding no other official position under the United States, of whom not more than two will be of the same party. They will prepare for the President rules which must provide that all persons who seek to obtain employment in any of the classes to which the act relates, shall submit to open, competitive examinations, which shall be practical in their character and relate as far as may be to those matters which will fairly test their relative capacity and fitness to discharge the duties of the

service into which they seek to be appointed. The Commissioners will make rules and regulations for such examinations; will select places for holding them at Washington, and, in each State and Territory, so located as to make it reasonably convenient and inexpensive for the applicants to attend. Those examinations will be held as frequently as the wants of the service demand, and will be conducted by and under the charge of Boards of Examiners, which will consist of at least three persons, residents of the State or Territory in which they are to act, and employed in the official service of the United States, to be selected by the Commissioners after consulting the head of the department or office in which such persons serve.

A chief examiner, to be selected and employed by the Commissioners, will act with the examining boards, and secure accuracy, uniformity and justice in their proceedings, which shall at all times be open to him. The boards of examiners will report their proceedings and the examinations to the Commissioners, who will furnish to the appropriate appointing power the names of the applicants who pass the examinations for the respective classes, with the standing of each, as shown by the examinations, and those of the highest standing will be chosen to fill vacancies in the class for which they were examined, and when chosen will serve for a period of probation, after which, if they have given satisfaction, they will be appointed, if not rejected. The various appointing powers will report to the Commissioners the names of those who are appointed and rejected, and those who are transferred or removed, and those who resign. After six months from the passage of the act no person can enter or be promoted into any of such classes until he has passed an examination, or is shown to be specially exempted therefrom in conformity with the act.

Appointments to the departments at Washington will be apportioned among the States, Territories and the District of Columbia, according to the last preceding census. The President may, with the consent of the Senate, remove a Commissioner, and the Commissioners may at any time remove and substitute another qualified person for any member of the Boards of Examiners. The

act makes provision for all needful records, reports, salaries, the use of public buildings, prohibits under a penalty any unfair or corrupt practices towards the applicants, and under a severe penalty, and in the most comprehensive and stringent language, prohibits political assessments in every conceivable form, and the use of official authority to coerce the political action of any person or body. The act will be supplemented by rules to be supplied by the Commissioners, covering minor details.

In the protracted debate in the Senate, it was universally conceded and asserted that the civil service, in its present condition, was more or less inefficient, unduly expensive, and, as a political factor, highly demoralizing.

The reasons for the act, the propositions upon which it rests, are that the offices of the Government are trusts for the people, existing solely to carry on and do the work and administer the affairs of the country, and the system which will ascertain, with most simplicity and certainty, the fitness of those who seek to fill the offices, and secure the appointment of those most fit, will have that work done and will administer those affairs most efficiently and inexpensively, with the most safety and benefits, and is the best system, and the one to be adopted. That the existing system does not do that, inasmuch as it assumes that the offices are a supply of rewards or funds belonging to the party that has control of the Government, to be used, not only to compensate that party for its struggle in obtaining that control, but more especially the workers, the manipulators, the professional politicians in the party. The test is not, "Is he competent to fill the position?" but is, "What has he done, and what can and will he do to secure and maintain the supremacy of the party?" Officeholders are regarded as a disciplined body to be led into service, or to be taxed for service by either political party, and thereby the real will of the whole people may be frustrated, and many grave political evils come. That the civil service has attained such magnitude, the clerks in each of some of the departments numbering thousands, and of others hundreds, that it is impossible for the head of a depart-

ment or a large office to know or determine the fitness of the applicants, even if political influence and custom left him free to select. The next best system for selecting must be adopted. Experience in England during the fifteen years last past, and in this country, under the law of 1871, has demonstrated that the system of competitive examinations is the most perfect yet devised, and that it furnishes reliable evidence of the ability and qualifications of the person examined to perform the duties of the office to which he seeks to be appointed, and shields the civil service and the country from the many evils of the Spoils System.

The "Pendleton Bill" secures to a very limited range of offices the enforcement of this system. It carries the civil service of to-day a little way—and a little way only—toward that of our forefathers. As barriers between the two there are the statute of 1820, and those like unto it, the "Tenure of Office Act" of 1867, the traditions and customs of half a century, and the powerful hostile influence of those who have grown up with and reached position and office under the Spoils System.

I think most of you will understand the meaning and thought in my mind when speaking reproachfully of "politics" and "politicians." Those terms ought to be in honorable estimation; that they are not, is due to their modern uses. I have no sympathy with those who, through disappointment, envy, or a lack of manhood, confine their political action to speaking of "the dirty pool of politics," and of politics as an unclean thing. Politics is, and I expect will always remain, more or less unclean. It is difficult to state to what extent corruption and universal suffrage are necessarily concomitant. In England corruption through the use of money has increased step by step, and largely beyond proportion, with the extension of the franchise. Yet I think every citizen worthy of a country will exercise the privileges, which are the duties of citizenship, and it is his right and duty to insist and accomplish it, so far as he can, that his opinion, and the vote that gives it expression, shall not be nullified by a vote which is the expression of no opinion whatever, and reaches the ballot-box only as a means to obtain or retain "Spoils," or through fear of a superior officer or a mere gang of office seekers.

THE REAL OBJECTS OF CIVIL SERVICE REFORM.

ESSAY READ BY CHARLES R. PRATT BEFORE THE ELMIRA ASSOCIATION, MONDAY EVENING, FEBRUARY 12, 1883.

GENTLEMEN OF THE ASSOCIATION—Although all advocates of civil service reform agree as to its importance and even necessity, and are substantially at one as to the best means of accomplishing such reform, still I find not a little difference of opinion as to the real objects to be attained by such reform, and as to what particular results to be obtained by the contemplated changes make such changes especially desirable. To a large class the improvement of the service itself is the only object. They complain that our present service is inefficient, unduly expensive, and corrupt, and seek, by some different methods of appointment to office, to remedy these evils. Others seem to be advocates, not of civil service reform, but of the theory of competitive examination, and urge a reform in the civil service merely as an opportunity to put their theory into practice. Competitive examinations they consider as the only true test of qualification and fitness, and as the only method by which certain classes of men, whom they consider especially adapted to fill public positions, have any chance of getting them.

Now it is undoubtedly a fact that our present civil service is not what it ought to be. (What in the world is?) Moreover, it is possible and highly probable that it is not what it could be made; that in efficiency, economy, and integrity, it does not compare favorably with the service of other countries on the same

plane of civilization with ourselves. Again, it is highly probable that the service might, in those respects, be greatly improved by substituting, for our present methods of filling official positions, a carefully devised system of competitive examinations. But our civil service is not in such a terrible plight. The formal, red tape methods of conducting the public business, with their numerous checks and counter-checks; the constant surveillance of officials over the acts of each other; the pride of each head of a department to have the business of that department conducted in the best possible manner; the anxiety of each administration and the party in power to avoid scandal and occasion for criticism; all these influences, and many more that might be mentioned, tend to, and do, keep our present service in a condition, as to efficiency and honesty, at least respectable; while it is quite a question as to how a system of selection by competitive examinations will improve it.

In fact, if this were all there was in civil service reform; if the proposed reform simply meant an improvement in the manner of conducting the public business, or if it simply meant, by the substitution of a different method of selecting public officers, to exclude from official position those considered unfit, and to offer an opportunity to enter for those deemed specially adapted, the subject would not, at the present time, merit the attention that is now being given to it. If such were the only objects sought, there are other questions of far more vital importance to the country, and which would demand more immediate attention.

Of an advocate of this movement who holds the opinions I have above expressed, the question may very pertinently be asked: What are the objects of civil service reform? What greatly desired results will be attained by such a reform as you advocate? These questions I shall attempt briefly to answer. The civil business of the Government is carried on by about 100,000 officers and employes, with salaries ranging from a few hundreds to many thousands of dollars. These officers receive their positions, nominally and theoretically, by appointment from the executive head of the Government. But really, the appointments

are made on the recommendation, if not at the dictation, of the representatives or party leaders of the different districts in which, or from which, the appointments are made. In connection with this arrangement there has grown up also a custom of so long standing and so uniformly followed that it has gained among politicians almost the force of a law. This custom dictates that these official positions shall be distributed among those who have rendered the greatest amount of service to the party, and have done most to bring the party into power. They are bestowed avowedly as rewards for such services, and are looked upon and counted upon as such by the recipients.

Now from this source spring woes unnumbered. In the first place it makes every election a war of conquest for the spoils of office. As in the middle ages the feudal lords and barons, without shadow of cause or provocation, made constant war upon each other for the sole purpose of conquest, and as, after each battle, the victor confiscated the estate of the vanquished and divided it among his retainers, so now our two political parties, with no other issue involved, make periodical war upon each other for the spoils of office, and to the victor belong the spoils, which are distributed accordingly. Again, to continue the historical parallel, as during those conflicts of the feudal barons, involving no questions of right or patriotism, there grew up a class of professional soldiers; men who made a business of fighting and were ready to espouse any cause or serve under any flag, so long as the pay was good or loot abundant—so in these times has grown up a class of professional politicians; men who, to a greater or less extent, make a business of politics, and who, indifferent to principles or issues, render yeoman's service to that party to which they happen to be attached, in the hope of reward from the spoils of office.

Again; from this condition of our public service has sprung still another great evil. On account of our present methods of appointment to civil positions, giving to the political leaders the power to distribute the Government patronage among their followers, there has grown up that peculiar American institu-

tion, the political boss. To push the historical parallel still further—as the old feudal lords, using and relying upon their hired men-at-arms, kept in subjection the people of the territories over which they assumed control, relegating to them the duty of paying taxes and furnishing the revenues which were used in maintaining their hosts of mercenaries or of meeting the expenses of new conquests—so our modern political lords, relying upon their armies of office seekers, keep the people practically in political subjection, giving them no voice in determining the policy of the party, and granting to them only the privilege of paying the taxes and furnishing the salaries which are to be distributed among their followers.

These are, indeed, serious evils; but they are not all, nor the worst that spring from our present methods of official appointments. There is still another evil springing from the same source which, in its far reaching consequences and evil results, I consider more important and worthy of attention than any of the others. This evil consists in the extreme difficulty, under our present methods, of getting any question of principle or policy before the people for their determination, and the almost utter impossibility of obtaining a fair expression of the opinion of the people on such questions, when submitted to them. As I have before remarked, every election, as at present conducted, is merely a contest for the spoils of office; and, by election, I mean the whole process of getting a candidate into nomination and electing him, from the caucus to the polls. In these contests the people at large have but little practical interest. They are carried on almost entirely by the professional politicians, the people acting merely as spectators and abettors. It is a game played by the politicians with the offices for stakes, and they play to win.

To men engaged in such a contest, and for such purposes, questions of principle or policy are disturbing elements in the conflict. They are sure to bring uncertainty, and possibly disaster. Consequently all such questions are carefully avoided, and neither party dare advocate any principle or line of policy on which a fair issue can be taken. Hence, not since the war has a fair issue on any

national question been submitted to the people of this country, and no principle been advocated by either party, except such as were simply appeals to sectional or class prejudices.

But even when such questions have been submitted to the people, as they have sometimes been in this State, they have met with no attention or consideration. People at large will not consider questions of this character unless urged upon their attention. What is everybody's business is nobody's business. To the great mass of people politics is but a small part of life, and in order to receive any attention from them, questions of public interest must be brought to their attention and their importance urged upon them. But the very class of men, whose business it should be to present these questions to the people and urge upon them the importance of a correct determination of them, is the very class that now is especially interested in keeping such questions out of sight and banishing them entirely from the realm of politics. And as the many, but slightly interested in any matter, are always influenced by the few who are deeply interested in the same matter, so the professional politician determines the character of our entire political life, and the whole matter is looked upon by citizens at large as merely a strife for office and an affair with which questions of principle have nothing to do. True, the newspapers make a show of discussing the supposed issues of a campaign, and speakers on the stump make some attempt to elucidate the principles of their party; but everywhere else, in private conversation, in the street, at the caucus and the polls, there is an absence of that old time discussion of principles and issues, but always the question as to who is ahead or what dodge is to be played next.

It may be urged that this evil is due to a fault inherent in human nature; that people, generally, will not interest themselves in questions of public welfare which do not directly and apparently affect their personal interests; that in small, primitive communities, where every man's welfare is directly affected by the public weal, it is possible to obtain a due consideration and fair determination of public questions; but that in larger com-

munities, with more complicated and exacting methods of business and modes of living, and where the relation of public to private welfare is less apparent, the mass of people, engrossed in personal affairs, can not be brought to the due consideration of public questions. My only reply to this is that it may be so; but that our Government was founded on another theory. The Republic was established in the confident expectation that a people as far advanced as we in civilization will, as a general rule, duly consider and rightly determine all questions affecting the public welfare. If this expectation be not well founded the government of the people, by the people, and for the people, if not an Utopian dream impossible of realization, has at least been prematurely attempted, and will have to be deferred to some more evolved state of the race.

The first question that suggests itself in considering these evils that spring from our present political methods is, of course, the question of remedy. It seems to me that in what I have already said I have substantially indicated what the first step in any attempt to eradicate these evils should be. It is the elimination from politics of the professional politician. It is, if possible, to do away with that class of persons who, making politics a business, follow it merely for the spoils of office. This at first sight would seem to be an almost herculean task. There is, however, one way in which it can be accomplished, and only one. It can only be effected by making the business unprofitable. If it were made impossible for party leaders and political bosses to reward their followers, they would lose their following. If no amount of political activity or service to a party would avail in the procuring of official position, those who now are so active in rendering such services for such purposes would soon seek fresh fields and pastures new. In other words, if the whole power of making official appointments was taken away from the executive head of the Government, substituting therefor some more or less automatic method of filling such positions, and leaving in the hands of no persons, or set of persons, the power of bestowing patronage, the professional politician's occupation would be gone and the great

army of office-seekers would be dispersed. This is substantially what the advocates of civil service reform propose to accomplish, so far as it can be under the Constitution.

But there still remains a very important question. If the power of filling these subordinate positions in the Executive department of the Government is taken away from the head of that department, where it would seem properly to belong, in what manner shall those positions be filled? And this question brings us directly to the consideration of the merits of competitive examinations. I am not an ardent advocate of this method. I am somewhat skeptical, and I find that those who have had most experience with examinations in general are still more skeptical as to its efficacy as a test of qualification and fitness. Still more do I repudiate some of the arguments advanced by advocates of this system. By some its adoption is urged on the ground that it will afford opportunities to obtain official positions to a large class of men whom they consider well adapted to fill such positions, but who, on account of their distaste and lack of adaptation to practical politics, have no chance of obtaining them under our present methods. Others advocate the system on the theory that it will give to every American youth, whatever his color, race, or previous condition, a fair chance of obtaining official position.

There seems to be inherent in the constitution of the average American a ruling passion for office; and there seems also to be widely disseminated a feeling, if not belief, that one of the main purposes of a government is to afford opportunities for the satisfaction of this ambition. Now, it can not be too strongly borne in mind that the civil service of a government exists for the purpose of carrying on the civil business of that government, and it is a matter of comparative indifference what men or class of men occupy the positions in such service, so long as the business of the government is conducted in the best possible manner.

Much has been said during the discussion of this question of civil service reform, about conducting the business of the Government on business principles. Now, business principles, if they have any application in this connection, would dictate that the

responsible head of any department should have the sole power of appointing his subordinates, not only on account of that very responsibility, but for the further reason that he is supposed to be best acquainted with the duties to be performed and the qualifications necessary to perform them. And unquestionably this would be the proper and by far the best method of filling such positions, could the heads of departments be relied upon to fill them with an eye single to the efficiency of the service. But a government department and an ordinary business differ in this, that whereas the head of a business holds his position independent of those he employs, the head of a government department, under our present methods, owes his position directly or indirectly to the services of the very men who are demanding office under him and whose services were rendered with the express or tacit understanding that they were to be so rewarded. Moreover, the very maintenance of his position by such head of department, and the continuance of his party in power, depends to a great extent on the judicious and politic use of the patronage under his control. So it happens that the best and most natural method of filling subordinate positions in the world generally, is the very method which, on account of its attendant evils, must be abandoned in filling official positions.

And so again we come to competitive examinations. It may be that some better method may yet be devised. It may be that something better has already been suggested and escaped my attention; but so far as I know, notwithstanding its many imperfections, competitive examination is the next best method of selecting our public servants. Most of the prejudice, and many of the objections to competitive examinations arise from a narrow view of examinations in general, founded upon our experience of them in the past. There are many things about a man that determine his qualifications and fitness for any work. To mention a few of them: There are, first, his natural abilities, and the character or direction of those abilities. Secondly, his acquired abilities, or the amount of cultivation and improvement his faculties have received from exercise and training, and the direction of that

improvement. Thirdly, there are his acquirements, or the knowledge he has attained by study, or contact with the world, and the character or direction of those acquirements. Now, I think it will not be questioned that examinations, as they have been conducted in the past, and as they are generally understood, have been directed to determining only the acquirements of the person examined, and not only that, but to determining his acquirements in one direction only; namely, his knowledge of the contents of books. So that the very word examination brings back to most of us unpleasant recollections of school or college, and is associated in our minds almost exclusively with scholarly attainments.

But need examinations be confined to this narrow field? Is it not possible for a body of men, fully understanding and making a special study of the subject, to devise such a system of examinations as shall determine the entire capabilities of a man, and thoroughly test his fitness for any position for which he is a candidate?

But, whether this can be accomplished or not, any method which shall give us a civil service as good even as the one we have at present, and which, at the same time, takes the filling of subordinate official positions entirely out of the realm of politics, will greatly assist in the attainment of the objects sought by the advocates of civil service reform.

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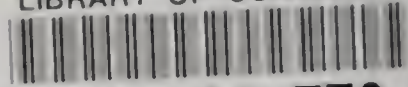


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